

Reflections on the Birth Date of Chiropractic

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The eighteenth of September 1895 is the date on which Daniel David Palmer is said to have performed the first chiropractic adjustment on Harvey Lillard, an African-American janitor working in the Ryan Building, which housed Dr. Palmer's magnetic healing practice in downtown Davenport, Iowa. The profession of chiropractic traditionally celebrates its establishment annually on 18 September and the Palmer College of Chiropractic, the first chiropractic educational institution, has designated this date as "Founder's Day."

Although 18 September 1895 is the date revered as the birth date of the chiropractic profession, historians and others have questioned this date's accuracy. Solon Massey Langworthy, D.O., D.C., questioned the truthfulness of the 18 September 1895 birth date as early as December of 1904, suggesting that the originator of chiropractic proposed a 1 December 1895 founding. Later, Cyrus Lerner, a New York attorney, questioned the 18 September 1895 date suggesting that Harvey Lillard himself indicated the event took place in January of 1896.

Three possible dates have now been proposed: 18 September 1895, 1 December 1895, and sometime in January 1896. The historical evidence is reviewed to shed light on this controversy surrounding the founding date of the chiropractic profession.

Introduction

The profession of chiropractic traditionally celebrates its establishment annually on 18 September. Palmer College of Chiropractic, the first chiropractic educational institution, has designated this date as "Founder's Day." The eighteenth of September 1895 is the date on which Daniel David Palmer is said to have performed the first chiropractic adjustment on Harvey Lillard, an African-American janitor working in the Ryan Building, which housed Dr. Palmer's magnetic healing practice in downtown Davenport, Iowa.

In his 1910 tome, D.D. Palmer describes the incident that would serve as the ember in the tinder bundle that he would blow

into the flame of the chiropractic healing art:

On Sept. 18, 1895, Harvey Lillard called upon me. He was so deaf for seventeen years that he could not hear the noises on the street. Mr. Lillard informed me that he was in a cramped position and felt something give in his back. I replaced the displaced 4th dorsal vertebrae by one move, which restored his hearing fully.^{1(p.137)}

The date of 18 September 1895 is revered in chiropractic circles as the actual birth date of the profession. In this treatise the historical evidence will be reviewed to evaluate the accuracy of this proposed autumnal event.

Accounts of the Harvey Lillard Miracle

At least three somewhat conflicting accounts have been put forth to describe the first chiropractic adjustment that is said

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to have restored the deaf janitor's hearing. The first presented here is an expanded version of the one above, authored by D.D. Palmer:

Harvey Lillard, a janitor, in the Ryan Block, where I had my office, had been so deaf for 17 years that he could not hear the racket of a wagon on the street or the ticking of a watch. I made inquiry as to the cause of his deafness and was informed that when he was exerting himself in a cramped stooping position, he felt something give way in his back and immediately became deaf. An examination showed a vertebra racked from its normal position. I reasoned that if that vertebra was replaced, the man's hearing should be restored. With this object in view, a half-hour's talk persuaded Mr. Lillard to allow me to replace it. I racked it into position by using the spinous process as a lever and soon the man could hear as before. There was nothing "accidental" about this, as it was accomplished with an object in view, and the result expected was obtained. There was nothing "crude" about this adjustment; it was specific, so much so that no Chiropractor has equaled it.^{1(p.18)}

The next account of the Lillard occurrence was put forth by attorney-chiropractor Willard Carver:

Harvey Lillard was the janitor of the Ryan Block, and in September 1895, came to Dr. Daniel David Palmer for general restoration; but particularly because some seventeen years before he had been lifting in a stooped and cramped position, in the room of a mine, when he suddenly felt the sensation of something giving away in his back, from which moment he ceased to hear out of his left ear. Dr. Palmer gave him the manipulations of the magnetic healer called the long passes of the spine or back. Incident to these, he observed that there was an area near the fourth thoracic vertebra that when undisturbed was too light colored, and when manipulated became excessively red; and he noticed that either color changed slowly.

The facts led Dr. Daniel David Palmer to make a close investigation of the tissues of Lillard's back, as a result of which he arrived at the conclusion that a segment (vertebra) was not in its right position; that is, was out of relationship with its fellows.

So soon as Dr. Palmer reached the conclusion mentioned, he began to devise ways and means of ascertaining whether his conclusion was sustained by fact; and as is always true, this was the real thing of importance to be accomplished; and it was found to present many difficulties and it might be said, parenthetically, that the same phenomena still presents many difficulties to many persons.

However, at the expense of a good deal of effort, and the study of the situation for more than a week, Dr. Palmer reached the conclusion that the fourth thoracic vertebra was disrelated in a certain direction, and the segment should be moved in the reverse direction to restore relationship.

However, the distortion stubbornly resisted all his efforts to correct it. He performed all of the manipulations known to his system, but failed to make apparent correction of the situation.

Finally, on the 18th day of September, 1895, Dr. Daniel David Palmer, becoming impatient, struck the vertebra a short, sharp blow, with the ulnar side of his fist or closed hand, with the happy result that, although it hurt considerably, there was a snap and the bump changed appearance markedly, with the startling, but nevertheless true, result that the left ear was almost instantly unstopped, and remained so permanently.^{2(pp.4,5)}

Additionally, Vern Gielow interviewed Harvey Lillard's daughter, Valdeenia Simons, in 1981. He relates her retelling of the story of her father's experience in the following manner:

According to Mrs. Simons, her father and a friend were telling humorous stories outside of the open doorway leading to D. D. Palmer's office. D. D. was reading a book in his favorite chair. Overhearing the loud conversation which was taking place, Palmer decided to join the two men and walked into the hall where they were standing. Obviously enjoying the story's climax, D. D., laughing heartily, struck Harvey on the back with the book he had carried with him. Several days later, Lillard commented to Palmer that he thought he could hear a bit better following the merriment of the storytelling and the back slapping incident. D. D. commented, "We'll try to do something about that." Shortly, he began working with Lillard to restore his hearing.^{3(pp.78-79)}

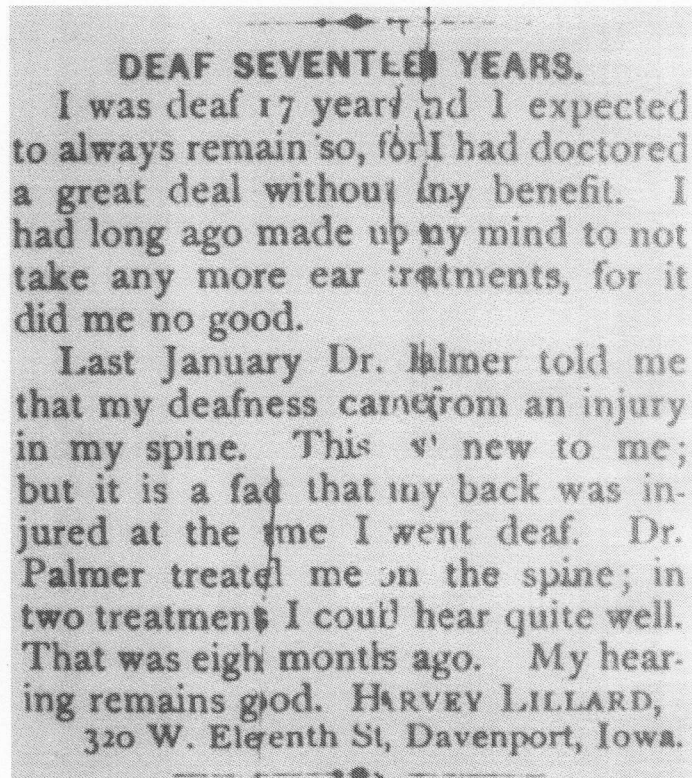


Figure 1. D.D. Palmer's, *The Chiropractic* (left), and Harvey Lillard's testimonial printed on page 3.

Each of the above descriptions were penned between 15 and 86 years following the actual incident. At least one other description of the event exists in the form of a testimonial purported to be authored by Harvey Lillard himself:

I was deaf 17 years and I expected to always remain so, for I had doctored a great deal without any benefit. I had long ago made up my mind to not take any more ear treatments, for it did me no good.

Last January Dr. Palmer told me that my deafness came from an injury in my spine. This was new to me; but it is a fact that my back was injured at the time I went deaf. Dr. Palmer treated me on the spine; in two treatments I could hear quite well. That was eight months ago. My hearing remains good.⁴

Interestingly, the Lillard testimonial first appears in print in a January 1897 promotional broadside-like newspaper published and distributed by D.D. Palmer (Figure 1). Because the Lillard testimonial was first printed in a document with a January 1897

publication date, this would imply that the initial chiropractic adjustment actually occurred sometime in January of 1896, not in September of 1895, as is the generally accepted founding date of the chiropractic profession.

These facts set up the controversy regarding the actual date of this seminal event for the chiropractic profession. One must ask, however, why is there this discrepancy between the dates suggested by the two individuals that were present and involved in the event that launched chiropractic? In addition, much is known about, and much has been written about the founder of chiropractic,^{5,6} but relatively little is known about the first chiropractic patient. This also leads to the questions as to who was Harvey Lillard and could he really have authored the testimonial that bears his name in D.D. Palmer's January 1897 issue of *The Chiropractic*?

Harvey Lillard

Little has been written about the life and experiences of Harvey Lillard. Willard Carver, an attorney-chiropractor and confidante of D.D. Palmer's wrote the following:

Sometime prior to 1895, one Harvey Lillard, a spanish creole West Indian octoroon, lived at What Cheer, Iowa; and was engaged in the coal mining business. He had been injured in the coal mine, and his hearing was very defective in the left ear.

At the same time Lillard lived in What Cheer, one Daniel David Palmer, also lived there, and was engaged in the grocery and fish business; and because of his extensive advertisement of gold fish, was called Fish Palmer.

Later, Daniel David Palmer left the grocery and fish industry, and went into the magnetic healing business at Burlington, Iowa; he having obtained his instruction in that system from the celebrated Dr. Paul Caster of Ottumwa, Iowa, who could neither read nor write.

About 1888 Dr. Daniel David Palmer located in Davenport, Iowa; and opened a magnetic healing office and sanitarium on the fourth floor of the Ryan Block at Second and Brady Streets.

Harvey Lillard was the janitor of the Ryan Block, and in September 1895, came to Dr. Daniel David Palmer for general restoration; but particularly because some seventeen years before he had been lifting in a stooped and cramped position, in the room of a mine, when he suddenly felt the sensation of something giving away in his back, from which moment he ceased to hear out of his left ear. . .²

In the spring of 1981, Dr. Bobby Westbrook, a practicing African-American chiropractor from St. Louis, Missouri, interviewed Valdeenia Simons, the daughter of Harvey Lillard, for an article he eventually had published in the scholarly journal, *Chiropractic History*. Westbrook's article was predominantly concerned with the challenges experienced by African-Americans within the chiropractic profession as both patients and practitioners. He

touches on the life of Harvey Lillard within this context:

Harvey Lillard was born in 1856 to a family which had its origins in Virginia. His father was the son of an English nobleman by one of his slaves and, unlike many such offspring, carried the father's family name of Lillard. Harvey Lillard married Amanda Christine Bradshaw and lived his early life in Davenport, Iowa. He operated what would now be called a janitorial service company. According to Mrs. Simons, he would get hired to provide janitorial services for buildings, then would hire other men to work for him. It was in one of these buildings that D. D. Palmer had his office and in which the first chiropractic adjustment took place.

When asked if Harvey Lillard continued with chiropractic after his hearing returned, Mrs. Simons nodded and added that he and D.D. had made a pact. D.D. would work with him to find out what had caused his hearing to be restored. "The compact was," said Mrs. Simons, "that if they can make (something of) it, then they both would share. But that didn't happen."

Harvey Lillard left Davenport in 1907, when Valdeenia was twelve years old, and moved to Seattle, Washington. His daughter believes that the growing conflict between D.D. Palmer and his son, B.J., was partly responsible for her father's decision to leave Davenport. "I think my dad got out of Davenport to get away from all that mess they had," she said. Harvey Lillard worked for Montgomery Ward in Seattle and later became a deputy sheriff. He re-married, had a daughter, and later assumed the responsibility of raising two grandchildren after the early death of his daughter. He remained an active man until his own death in 1925.⁷

In summary, what has been reported regarding the first chiropractic patient may be listed in the following inventory:

1. Lillard was born in 1856, five years prior to the start of the U.S. Civil War;
2. He was the descendant of African slaves and English nobility;
3. Lillard's hearing was damaged while working in the mining industry;
4. He provided janitorial services for the Ryan building where D.D. Palmer kept

offices for his magnetic healing practice;

5. D.D. Palmer performed a manual manipulation that both parties claimed restored Lillard's previously damaged hearing;

6. The first chiropractic adjustment performed upon Harvey Lillard occurred when Lillard was about 39 years old, approximately 30 years after the conclusion of the U.S. Civil War.

The information concerning the life and times of Harvey Lillard were reviewed above to provide context for the following question: Was Harvey Lillard, a descendant of slaves born five years prior to the initiation of the U.S. Civil War, able to read or write?

This question becomes important to determine who was the actual author of the testimonial that he is supposed to have penned for the January 1897 edition of *The Chiropractic*.

African-American Literacy in Harvey Lillard's Time

In August of 1831 a slave rebellion led by Nat Turner of South Hampton County, Virginia, resulted in the deaths of up to 65 Caucasians. Turner, a slave who could read and write, studied and preached the Bible, and had visions he alleged were messages from God. He believed the revolt was divinely inspired and blessed. The insurrection was quickly crushed.⁸

In response to the Turner led revolt, legislation would be passed in the South severely restricting slave gatherings, travel, and literacy. Keeping slaves unable to read or write so as not to be exposed to abolitionist literature and ideas was believed to be essential to the security of the slaveholders. These attitudes and legal pronouncements would affect Black literacy for decades.⁹

There is conflicting evidence as to Harvey Lillard's ability to read and write.

Descended from Virginia slaves and born five years prior to the start of the Civil War would tend to suggest that he would not be educated in his early years. Additionally, Margo¹⁰ reports that in 1890 over half of African-American males between the ages of 25-34 were illiterate. It is also important to note that being able to read only a few words was considered "literate" in this time frame. The ability to write by a person classified by these standards may not have been in the skill set of the person deemed literate.

Figure 2 is a table reprinted from the work of Snyder.¹¹ Upon examination, the percentages of African-Americans 5-19 years of age in 1861, when Harvey Lillard would have been five years old, indicates enrollments in school of only about two percent. These data presented by Margo¹⁰ and Snyder¹¹ are evidence—but not proof—that Harvey Lillard was likely unable to read or write.

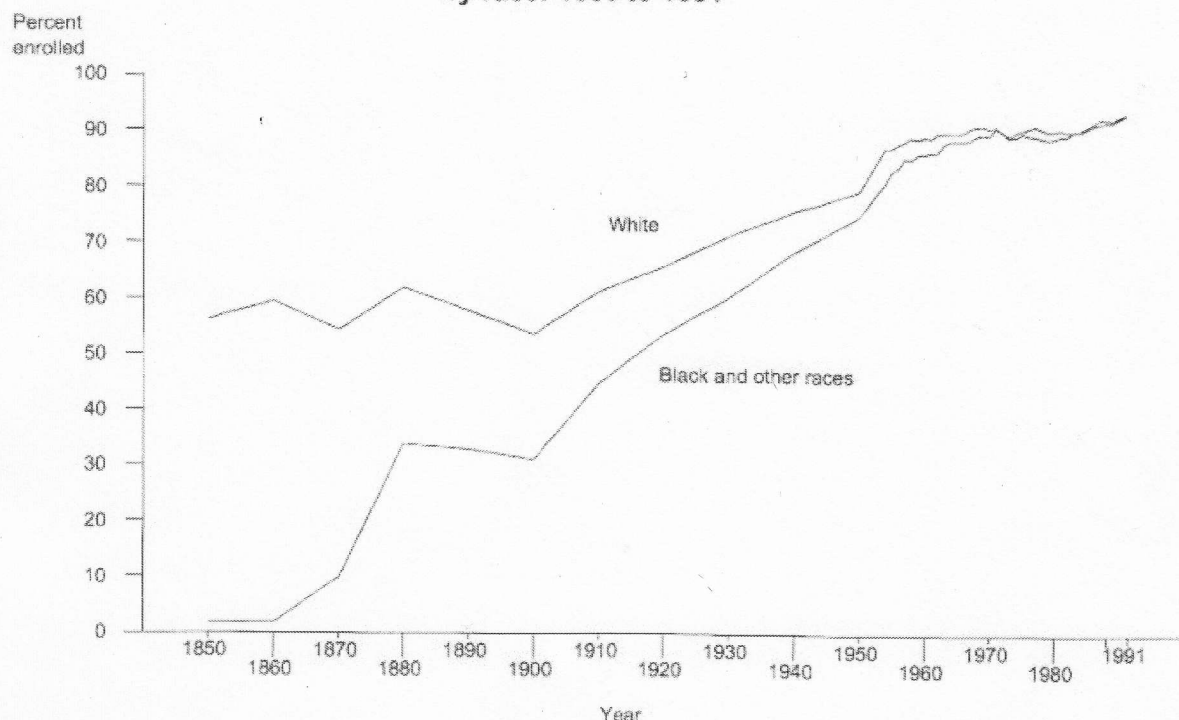
Evidence also exists that is contrary to that presented above regarding Harvey Lillard's literacy. From his interviews with Valdeenia Simons, the daughter of Harvey Lillard, Westbrook reports the following:

Mrs. Simons, still living in Peoria, Illinois, was visited this spring to gather additional background for this paper. She delights in re-telling the stories about her father and his experiences in Davenport. **They corresponded regularly** before his death in 1925 at the age of sixty-nine . . .

... **According to a letter he wrote to his daughter**, Valdeenia, two weeks before he died, Mr. Lillard was planning to return to the Davenport area" But on September 7, 1925, after cutting wood and storing it in his basement, he remarked to a neighbor that he didn't feel too good. He died that day, one day after his sixty-ninth birthday.^{7(emphasis added)}

Westbrook's reporting, based upon his interviews with Lillard's daughter, represents evidence that the first chiropractic patient could indeed read and write;

**Figure 1.-- Percent of 5- to 19-year-olds enrolled in school,
by race: 1850 to 1991**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; and Current Population Reports, Series P-20, *School Enrollment - Social and Economic Characteristics of Students*, various issues.

Figure 2. Percentages of 5-19 year olds enrolled in school by race and year. Reprinted from Snyder.¹¹

evidence, but not proof. McHenry¹² reviews the phenomenon of reading societies that grew out of the desire of African-Americans to improve their lot in life. These reading societies were established by enterprising educated Blacks to spread literacy and improved thinking and analytical skills across their race. These societies organized in libraries and churches; their reading rooms were places for African-Americans with varying degrees of education to gather and share and expand their knowledge. Literate members would read aloud to those who did not possess the skill themselves. It does not require a large leap to conclude that these societies would represent places where illiterate individuals would acquire the help to be able to corre-

spond with friends and relatives living distances apart. Perhaps this is the method that a potentially illiterate Harvey Lillard was able to correspond with his daughter Valdeenia. Only further research will conclusively prove whether Harvey Lillard possessed the skills to read and write.

Regardless, if one looks at the testimonial that was supposedly authored by Mr. Lillard for the January 1897 issue of *The Chiropractic* (Figure 1) one sees a well written and sophisticatedly punctuated two-paragraph writing style. The semicolon is perhaps the most often incorrectly used piece of punctuation in the English language. This piece of punctuation is used correctly twice within Lillard's published testimony. In light of all the evidence

presented above, one must ask: Were these well-written paragraphs crafted by a potentially illiterate African-American janitor or a person acknowledged to have been a former school teacher^{5,6} known as D.D. Palmer?

Whether or not D.D. Palmer actually authored or simply transcribed Harvey Lillard's testimonial, one thing is abundantly clear: As the editor and publisher of *The Chiropractic*, D.D. Palmer was certainly aware of the contents of Lillard's account of the first chiropractic adjustment—including the date suggested in the account as January of 1896. So again we are left with the question: Why the discrepancy between dates of discovery suggested by Lillard's testimonial and Palmer's account in his 1910 text *The Chiropractor's Adjustor*?

Cyrus Lerner

Cyrus Lerner was an attorney and journalist hired by the New York based Foundation for Health Research, Inc., to assist in achieving licensure for chiropractors in the state of New York. He began his work by conducting a study of the early years of chiropractic. For decades his report would remain unpublished as his findings would be rejected in 1965 by Dave Palmer and the Foundation for Health Research, Inc.¹³ In 1996 Keating would reproduce Lerner's report so that historians and others might examine his work and decide for themselves the merits of Lerner's reflections on chiropractic and the events of the early years of the profession.

In regards to the founding date of the profession, Lerner points out that Lillard's testimonial in *The Chiropractic* and Palmer's account in *The Chiropractor's Adjustor* were at odds. Lerner states: "The facts concerning the origin of Chiropractic made one wonder what was 'history' and what was 'twistory'."¹⁴ Lerner proposes a

theory as to how this discrepancy in dates evolved and shall be reviewed here.

The Lerner Theory¹⁴

In his report Lerner raises the issue of the discrepancy of dates regarding chiropractic's genesis. He begins by discussing the differences between one who is a discoverer and one who is an inventor.

Lerner states that a discoverer is one who makes known something previously unknown or unseen. He goes on to state that discovery of some natural phenomenon confers no special status under the law upon the discoverer.

Conversely, an inventor is one who devises some new process, appliance, machine or article. Unlike the discoverer of some natural phenomenon, an inventor may receive special status under the law if his invention is patent-worthy.

A patent is a property right for an invention that is granted by a government to the inventor that gives that inventor the right to prohibit others from producing, utilizing, offering for sale, or selling their invention throughout the country granting the patent—or the importation of said invention into the country granting the patent.

Things that cannot be patented include laws of nature, physical phenomenon, abstract ideas, literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works, and inventions not considered useful or possible (such as perpetual motion machines), or things considered offensive to public morality. Although literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works cannot be patented, these types of expressions are eligible for copyright protection.

In contrast to patents, copyrights are a set of exclusive legal rights authors have over their works for a limited period of time. Copyrights cannot be granted, however, for any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, prin-

ciple or discovery. Only a specific description put forth by an author regarding an idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery would be eligible for copyright protection. Naturally, a copyright granted to a first author describing a particular system or method of operation would not prevent a second author from describing the same system or method of operation, as long as the second author expressed his ideas in a different manner than the first author.

After explaining these concepts, Lerner poses the question as to whether D.D. Palmer was a discoverer or an inventor. It should be obvious to the reader that D.D. Palmer, through his experimentation with Harvey Lillard, discovered the natural phenomenon that dysfunction in the upper dorsal spine may interfere with the sense of hearing, presumably by way of its sympathetic innervation—a natural phenomenon. As a result of that discovery, he then invented a process or system for finding and reducing osseous subluxations of the vertebrae and bones of the appendicular skeleton that might be causing dysfunction in the nervous system.

Given the limitations of the protections afforded by patents or copyrights described above, it naturally follows that the system or method of operation of chiropractic analysis and corrective techniques would not be subject to the protections granted through either patent or copyright laws.

After establishing these facts, Lerner reviews the circumstances of D.D. Palmer's departure from Davenport to go to the West Coast circa 1902, after transferring the school and its belongings to his son B.J. With the Founder traveling the country, the fate of the chiropractic profession would fall into the hands of his young and inexperienced son.

In the absence of his father, how was B.J. Palmer, a young man of 20 years of

age with minimal formal education, to advance and defend the fledgling profession of chiropractic? Outside forces in the form of the allopathic and osteopathic establishments threatened the survival of chiropractic. In addition, forces from within the profession such as Solon Massey Langworthy, a graduate of the Palmer School, threatened the young B.J. for supremacy and leadership of the immature healing art.

As a result of these threats, Lerner reports that B.J. felt a need to establish a date of discovery and stake his family's claim to the profession:

Unfamiliar as a young man in matters pertaining to legal rights and working without benefit of counsel to guide him . . . B.J. conceived the idea that it was necessary to establish a 'legal priority' for the discovery of chiropractic. . . Acting under that erroneous and mistaken impression, which first originated with the Osteopaths, who did the same thing—B.J. began 'developing' Chiropractic as if he were promoting an 'invention'—instead of promoting the cause of knowledge—an unpatentable item. . .

By following the road charted by the Osteopath, B.J. established the date when Chiropractic was 'discovered' when the first issue of *'The Chiropractor'* was published in 1904. . .

At that time he wrote the following on the inside cover of the first issue:

'CHIROPRACTIC—is from two Greek words—hand done—done by hand—a hand practitioner—one who repairs—one who adjusts.

HISTORICAL—Chiropractic was discovered by Palmer of Davenport, Iowa, in September of 1895. He has developed it into a well defined science, that has no resemblance whatever to any therapeutical method. The cures are made by adjustments that are unique and unlike any movements used by any other school . . . ' (author's emphasis)¹⁴

So, in an effort to establish a date of discovery, B.J. put forth September of 1895 as the date of the first chiropractic adjustment. According to Lerner, he was not aware that

this date conflicted with the date put forth in Harvey Lillard's testimonial published seven years earlier in the 1897 issue of his father's advertising newspaper, *The Chiropractic*.

But, this explanation still does not elucidate why D.D. Palmer himself repeated this conflicting date yet another six years later in his account of the Lillard miracle in the 1910 text *The Chiropractor's Adjustor*. Lerner provides additional insight as to how that error in dates may have been perpetuated by the Founder:

When a student came to the Palmer school, he was not given any books to read. Education was oral. The only 'scientific literature' on the subject of Chiropractic consisted of two written items; the first item was a small printed paper bearing the title to an article—'Luxation of Bones Cause Disease'—with Dr. Palmer's name appended at the end of the article. The second paper consisted of four pages and was printed to simulate the size and appearance of a large ordinary daily newspaper. This paper was called 'The Chiropractic.'

... "Many efforts have been made in the past to show the list of the very earliest students and graduates of Chiropractic. In 1910 Palmer went to some length trying to set forth a 'true list' when he wrote his book entitled 'The Chiropractor's Adjuster.'

In the 1899 issue of 'The Chiropractic,' however, you will find testimonial letters from at least two students and graduates, who were never mentioned in any subsequent account, intended to portray the historical continuity of the Chiropractic profession. . . L.W. Roberts of Boston, Mass. . . W.A. Crawford of Buffalo, N.Y. . .

... The fact that the names of these two very early students and graduates of Chiropractic have been omitted from the later writings on Chiropractic might indicate that Palmer no longer had any copies left of his 1899 literature when he composed his future commentaries and therefore could only rely upon memory as to what he said and what he wrote in those days.

If this is true, it might help us to understand and help clear up the numerous and conflicting stories that had been offered re-

garding the famous Harvey Lillard incident—which was intended to be the spark that touched off the discovery of Chiropractic . . ."¹⁴

Lerner has suggested a possible and plausible explanation as to how D.D. Palmer may have confused the date of the first chiropractic adjustment. He simply may have forgotten what date he first put forth in his written promotional materials in 1897. B.J. Palmer would have been a boy of about 14 years of age at the time of the Lillard event and his stormy relationship with his father and step-mother may have blurred the timeline for him, as well.

Langworthy Questions the Date of Discovery

Dr. Solon Massey Langworthy was Iowa born and bred. In addition to a degree from Bayless Business College, Langworthy also attended the American College of Manual Therapeutics, a school teaching osteopathic techniques in Kansas City, Missouri. Following completion of his education in Kansas City, Langworthy studied chiropractic methods under D.D. Palmer and obtained his Palmer School of Chiropractic and Cure diploma in 1901.¹⁵

Langworthy established his practice in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in late 1901 and founded the American School of Chiropractic and Nature Cure toward the end of 1903, serving as the first and only president of this incorporated chiropractic institution. In addition to founding a chiropractic school, Langworthy is credited with a number of important firsts in the chiropractic profession. These accomplishments include¹⁵:

1. First use of the term "subluxation;"
2. First to recognize of the importance of the intervertebral foramina;
3. First to suggest the brain as the source of nerve energy;
4. First to make reference to erect posture

and gravity in human biomechanics;

5. First to claim supremacy of the nerves as opposed to blood as in osteopathy;

6. First to establish a systematic school curriculum;

7. First professional journal publication (*Backbone*, 1903),

8. First text-book publication (*Modernized Chiropractic, Volumes I & II*, 1906).

With all these accomplishments under his belt, Langworthy would place himself as a challenger to the Palmers' leadership of the profession. He was a vocal critic of D.D. Palmer, questioning his character and inability to keep his stories straight regarding the genesis of the profession. In a scathing denouncement of Old Dad Chiro, Langworthy raises the issue of Palmer's faulty memory and constant geographic relocations:

This same 'fountain head' (?) man, while in his fourth 'permanent location' says: 'I find, by reference to my books, the very first adjustment of the vertebra was done about Dec. 1, 1895. * * * * So I date Chiropractic from Dec. 1, 1895.' While in his sixth 'permanent location' he appears in print with the statement that 'the first PERSON was adjusted Sept. 18, 1895.

It is quite evident he has the wrong nozzle on his fountain . . .

. . . I, like others, believed at one time that this man was the originator of Chiropractic and at that time wrote him a letter stating I would be glad to see him at the head of a large school of Chiropractic . . .

. . . Time has proven, however, two things: First, that he is not the discoverer and originator. Second, he has neither the qualifications nor ability to equip and manage such a school. His nine years' record is proof positive of the last assertion.¹⁶

As a result of these investigations there are now three potential dates of discovery that have been put forth: 18 September 1895, 1 December 1895, and sometime in January of 1896.

September 1895 was the date B.J.

Palmer established in his inaugural issue of *The Chiropractor* in 1904, the 1 December 1895 is the date Langworthy reported that D.D. Palmer put forth in personal communications, and finally, January 1896 is the date inferred from the Lillard testimonial published in D.D. Palmer's *The Chiropractic* in January of 1897.

As described above, the 18 September 1895 is the date revered in the profession as THE date of the founding. This date was fixed in place by B.J. Palmer in 1904. One must ask why this date was chosen by B.J. Palmer? Again, Lerner proposes a possible explanation.

18 September 1895 Is Chosen by B.J.

Both Lerner¹⁴ and Dave Palmer¹⁷ relate the story of an incident when B.J. Palmer was a fourteen year old high school freshman: According to the legend, B.J. took two mice to school to play a prank on the girls in his class. Releasing the mice in the classroom caused quite a stir and, as a result of the commotion and disruption, B.J. was promptly expelled from the school. This incident would mark the end of B.J.'s formal education as his father would not advocate on his behalf to get him reinstated.

Interestingly, the boy who was unceremoniously ousted from high school would go on to head the first and arguably the most prestigious institution of higher learning in the chiropractic profession. Perhaps as a result of his expulsion, along with his personal experiences, B.J. would hold most forms of formal education in low regard for the remainder of his life. Keating, the leading scholar on the life of B.J. Palmer, states:

There was the paradox of Palmer's anti-intellectual intellectualism. This author of dozens of books, booklets, and pamphlets, and of thousands of journal articles disparaged most types of formal education. He could more easily make a chiropractor from

a plumber than a college graduate, he scoffed, since the former's mind was not so cluttered with useless information and medical beliefs. Like his Harvard drop-out mentor, Elbert Hubbard, Palmer thought the only worthwhile education was a practical one based on learning by doing. Theories were valid only if practical. Hard work was more virtuous than sheepskins. A diploma, he suggested, was no guarantee of 'brains'.¹⁸

In the ultimate irony, Lerner speculates that B.J. would fix the date of the discovery of chiropractic as the date that he was expelled from high school, 18 September 1895. Lerner proposes that B.J. would mark the end of his "formal" education and the beginning of his "practical" education as the birth date of the profession he would lead until his death in 1961.¹⁴ Given B.J.'s reported attitude toward formal education and his sense of humor, it seems as plausible an explanation as any for this choice of the 18 September 1895 date.

Unfortunately, there is only one thing wrong with Lerner's theory: It is patently false. An article in the 25 June 1897 *Davenport Weekly Leader* lists "Bartlett J. Palmer" among the ninth grade graduates of Davenport Public School Number 8.¹⁹ It would appear that the high school expulsion story was yet another "tall tale" spun by B.J. to add to his myth. In regard to his penchant for making up stories and events, B.J.'s son, David Palmer, states:

Dad had a fascinating ability to tell stories, sharing his experiences in a manner extremely interesting to everyone. He had the voice and tone to make a story come alive, fascinating his audiences. It is regrettable to say some of his stories and experiences were pure fabrication.

As with many geniuses, on telling a tale once or twice, he allowed it to become actual fact. . .

. . . B.J.'s theatrical ability could create in an exciting manner, an experience which never really, in truth, happened.(pp. 132-134)

We will likely never know the true rea-

son why 18 September 1895 was chosen by B.J. as the founding date for chiropractic. Perhaps, as his son implies, B.J. came to believe his own mythical tale about his expulsion from school and Lerner's theory is correct in the context of B.J.'s fondness for hyperbole. Perhaps he chose that date because it marked the onset of Rosh Hashanah in that year; a celebration in the Jewish calendar marking God's creation of Adam and Eve. Perhaps B.J. would use that celebration day of creation to mark the conception of his beloved chiropractic. Professional and amateur historians may speculate to their hearts' content, as documents providing proof of the actual date of the delivery of the first chiropractic adjustment are in conflict. Additionally, how might anyone know with certainty the motivations for choosing any specific date by the mind of a complicated man who has been deceased for better than 52 years?

Summary and Conclusion

Chiropractic was founded sometime between September of 1895 and late January of 1896. We can never be sure of the exact date as the documentary evidence is filled with conflicts that can probably never be reconciled.

One might wonder as to whether or not knowing with certainty the exact date of chiropractic's founding is really that important. By analogy, biblical scholars are certain that Jesus Christ was not likely born in the month of December, the month when his birth is celebrated by the Christian faithful.²⁰ The Bible does not specify a date or month. Additionally, shepherds did not let their flocks out to graze in December as the Bible accounts state occurred during the birth of Christ, because the fields would be dormant and unproductive at that time of year. So, the exact date of Christ's birth is not nearly as important as simply gathering together on some specified date

to celebrate one of the holiest events in the Christian faith.

Likewise, the exact date of the founding of chiropractic is not nearly as important as members of the chiropractic profession gathering together annually to celebrate and commemorate shared traditions and heritage. But more importantly, the real lesson to be learned from this exercise was perhaps best summarized by Keating when he said:

Agreed, this is historical trivia; in the larger scheme of chirohistory, it probably doesn't matter whether it was 18 September 1895 or the early months of 1896. However, the discrepancy should alert us to the possibility that some of chiropractic history is distorted, perhaps deliberately, perhaps unintentionally. (Joseph C. Keating, personal communication with the author, 15 September 2003.)

Notes

- 1 Palmer, D.D. (1910) *The chiropractor's adjustor*. Portland, OR: DD Palmer. pp. 18, 137.
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18 Keating, J.C. (1997). *B.J. of Davenport: The early years of chiropractic*. Davenport, IA: Association for the History of Chiropractic.

19 N.A. (1897, June 25). Ninth grade commencement. *Davenport (IA) Weekly Leader*, pp.6.

20 What are the most common misconceptions about Jesus Christ's birth? Retrieved from <http://www.christiananswers.net/christmas/mythsaboutchristmas.html>

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